

Our Soldiers, Our War:
The Public Imagination of Soldiers

by

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*“Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art...
It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things
that give value to survival.”*

C. S. Lewis

Thanks, Kate.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the image of the soldier is exploited by politicians and mainstream media sources to gain sympathy and support for war, and the way in which the images of soldiers are sometimes buried in the national public discourse, thus hiding the human cost of war. This thesis relies on wartime State of the Union addresses and *Newsweek Magazine*'s coverage of the Vietnam War and the War on Terror to represent how the public encounters the image of the soldier in these periods.

Politicians and the mainstream media often refrain from including the soldier in the national discourse of war. Yet, when they do, the image of the soldier is essential in how the public imagines the war. Their usage of the soldier's image shows that soldiers are sites of great pride, sympathy and other emotions for the American public and these ties are used to create support or avoid controversy in various ways by those who address the public. For wartime presidents, the soldiers are certainly a way to garner sympathy from their audience, but they must be spoken of carefully and economically. The American public is less likely to support a war, or buy a magazine when they are being reminded of soldiers dying, or of soldiers enacting violence against an unclear enemy. Thus, presidents much more frequently speak of the war and the actions of fighting it in abstractions and ideas. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Bush tend to ascribe the war to the American people and/or government as a whole; this gives ownership over the success or failure of the war to all Americans instead of just the president, the military or the soldiers. *Newsweek* tends to show soldiers as powerless, endangered patriots and not as active enactors of violence. The magazine often frames soldiers as being outside of the action, or in the aftermath of violence enacted on them – they represent the dangers of war as something for which the readers can feel sympathy, and not controversy about.

Soldiers represent the American public's emotional ties to war and can be used or hidden to help gain support for that war, or to speak of that war without offending. Soldiers remain important symbols of American patriotism and exceptionalism. They continue to be praised for their bravery and sacrifice through extreme danger. Very few people question the valor of the job that these men and women in uniform do. Because soldiers have such a highly-praised position in society, they are also an easily exploited group; that is not to say that presidents or even magazines misuse the image of the soldier, but rather that they take advantage of the emotional ties the public has to soldiers.

Looking at these constructions through *Newsweek Magazine* and the State of the Union shows how the soldier is presented by public entities and officials to the American public. The soldier can be used in various ways, but always carefully, whether the speaker is a president or a reporter. This thesis examines how the American public encounters these various constructions and images of soldiers.

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Introduction

This is not a stridently hard-boiled army (though some individuals in it are); it is tough, it is trained to fight and it fights exceeding[ly] well – but it does its fighting with the quiet, laconic, can-do doggedness of professionals. No one is particularly “Gung-Ho” and none of [these soldiers] would ever even think of yelling, “Geronimo.” (“Men at War” 28)

These men are professionals. Professional soldiers thrust into battle without political power. Soldiers, though they are often exalted for their bravery, are not framed by media and public officials as agents with far-reaching, violent intentions; instead, soldiers are presented as biting the proverbial American bullet. Soldiers fight battles that America needs them to fight, no more and no less. The image of the American soldier is typically a source of national pride, which is historically informed by wars that have been nationally recognized as successful in their efforts, and ultimately moral.¹ Because the image of the soldier affects national pride, imagining them as enactors of great violence would complicate that image and that imagining in dangerous ways. Thus, presidents and mainstream publications alike are more apt to describe these soldiers as performing their duty with “can-do” attitudes, and rarely present these soldiers being “gung-ho” about killing the enemy.²

This thesis explores the portrayed public understanding of the role of soldiers in the Vietnam War and War on Terror eras using State of the Union addresses from Presidents John F.

¹ American Revolutionary War, American Civil War, WWI and WWII are all wars that American history looks back at with few questions to the moral justifications and the success of American involvement and actions.

² “Can-do” and “gung-ho” are taken from the quote above.

Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and George W. Bush, as well as the coverage of these conflicts from *Newsweek Magazine*.³ Both the State of the Union and *Newsweek* hold public status in America because they are presentations of the country's affairs. This thesis will show that the image of the soldier is presented or buried in discussions of war to either garner sympathy or hide the human cost of war – often working respectively.

The image of the soldier is carefully evoked by media and politicians to appeal to the American public. Often, wars are spoken of without mentioning soldiers, especially in the State of the Union. Presidents abstractly describe American efforts abroad without naming which Americans are performing this equally abstract action. Wartime presidents use vague language to create an abstract image of war where the fight is between ideals and not bodies. This abstraction removes soldiers from the discussion and imagination of war. In this way, soldiers are often removed from the image of war when its costs, goals and success are in question. When politicians and writers discuss the soldier, they create an image that inspires sympathy and pride regardless of the public's perceived righteousness of the efforts abroad.

This thesis examines how public entities and officials portray the soldier in discussions of war in order to better understand how the public encounters the soldier; at least how this encounter occurs in *Newsweek* and the State of the Union. This movement shows that soldiers are sites of great pride, sympathy and emotions for the American public and those ties attempt to create support or avoid controversy in various ways by those who address the public. For wartime presidents, the soldiers are certainly a way to garner sympathy from their audience, but they must be spoken of carefully and economically. The American public is less likely to

³ Note on nomenclature: “Vietnam War” and “War in Vietnam” will be used interchangeably. “War on Terror” is a blanket term adopted by the media and government to describe both the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; I will use the term in the same way the media used it. Finally, the “State of the Union” is a full title, thus when this title is followed by “address/speech/report,” this final word will not be capitalized.

support a war when they are being reminded of soldiers dying, or of soldiers enacting violence against an unclear enemy. Thus, presidents much more frequently speak of the war and the actions of fighting it in abstractions and ideas, not as violence from men to men. Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and George W. Bush tend to ascribe the war to the American people and/or government as a whole; this attempts to give ownership over the success or failure of the war to all Americans instead of just the president, the military or the soldiers.

More often than not, soldiers are framed as “fighting with the quiet, laconic, can-do doggedness of professionals” (“Men at War” 28). In fact, there is only one clear shift away from the dutiful, yet tired image of soldiers, appears in *Newsweek* in the months immediately after September 11th, 2001. America was recovering from the attacks of 9/11 and this changed the view on military action, thus changing the image of the soldier. Unlike the Vietnam War, this attack was a clearer reason for the nation to seek revenge; the enemy was Al Qaeda, and eliminating that organization was the task at hand. The Vietnam War had far more mysterious beginnings as a war against the idea and threat of communism in the post-French Vietnam.⁴ As the war on Al Qaeda became a war in Afghanistan, and then Iraq, the American public became more skeptical of the value of this war and the likelihood of victory. *Newsweek*'s coverage of early military efforts in the Middle East shows that national support was on the side of this revenge; the soldiers are presented, for the first and last time, as being direct enactors of violence. A full discussion of this article appears in Chapter Two, but essentially these soldiers are shown to be “hunting” Osama bin Laden and actively performing violence (Thomas, 2001, 32). It is only in this moment of national support for the war, with definable military goals and reasons, that the soldier is presented in this actively violent way.

⁴ This was partially an after-effect of the Red Scare.

Soldiers are the site of emotional ties to war and can be used or hidden to help gain support for that war, or to cover that war without offending. Soldiers remain important symbols of American patriotism and exceptionalism. They continue to be praised by media, politicians and the portrayed American public for their bravery and sacrifice through extreme danger. Very few people publically question the valor of the job that these men and women in uniform do – even fewer public officials and media outlets question soldiers as a group because the idea of the soldier still remains so highly exalted.⁵

Soldiers are an easily and often exploited group precisely because they have such a highly-praised position in society; the image of the soldier is largely a public conception. That is not to say that presidents or even magazines are misusing the image of the soldier, but rather that they are taking advantage of the emotional ties the public has to the soldiers. Essentially, most Americans have historical knowledge of what it means to be a soldier and that highly patriotic, highly praised image is one that can be easily accessed by those who address the public to gain sympathy and emotional responses from the American public.

Primary Texts of Analysis

Though soldiers' images are found in many public sources, State of the Union messages and *Newsweek Magazine* will inform my analysis of soldiers in the public realm. These sources both reach large audiences, and work to represent sweeping American thoughts and opinions.⁶

⁵ As seen in Kristin Hass' Introduction from her unpublished book – (Hass, 2009, 1-27).

⁶ These sources may not reach that goal, but they do work to speak to large audiences.

The president is among the first who can work to shape or manipulate public opinion, whether the concept is perceived or actual, because he declares the wars, sends the troops and, in turn, must justify and explain these actions to the people of the country – at the least, he is the face of these actions. Presidents give specialized and frequent addresses throughout their time in office, but no speech holds quite as much prestige as the annual State of the Union, which is meant to outline America's achievements and goals. While this message is given in front of Congress, its audience encompasses American citizens and the international community. The State of the Union sets a precedent for what America will strive for in its future (Peters 1). This is one of the president's most important opportunities to formally present his ideas and suggestions for Congress – with full attention. Over the past century, the State of the Union has become an increasingly valued point of communication for the president, the Congress and citizens across the nation. The address gives the president an opportunity to reaffirm his role and his decisions with the country. Citizens pause to hear how their president will frame the nation's military actions, economic climate, social and cultural situations, and foreign affairs. In times of war, these addresses are even more important because they have the power to renew confidence in the nation's leadership. The State of the Union is an important tool in understanding how the president frames the war and soldiers who fight it.

In order to complement the presidential narratives and their portrayal of the war and the soldiers, I will also discuss popular media narratives. Together these narratives form a more complete depiction of American perceptions of soldiers and war. While there are many different weekly magazines published in America, *Newsweek* is among the most popular, reaching 4

million readers each month.⁷ The magazine has received a number of awards, especially in recent years, for its coverage of the War on Terror and other national issues.⁸ More recently, “[i]n 2006 and 2007, it was honored as a National Magazine Award finalist. In 2007, it was nominated for an Emmy Award” (“History of *Newsweek*” 1). *Newsweek* was first published in 1933 and covered each American war since it began (“History of *Newsweek*” 1). While the magazine certainly cannot speak for the whole of the American public, the magazine does attempt to speak *to* the whole of the American public. The stories give snapshots of the nation and, arguably, the world with topics ranging from entertainment to politics to science. Though *Newsweek* attempts to be perceived as neutral, the writers and stories tend to have more liberal undertones. For my studies, this left-lean is actually more telling than a more conservative viewpoint, which might be more generally supportive of Republican administrations (for Bush), military action and perceived patriotism. A magazine with more liberal writers might be more apt to show dissension against the war, the president and the government. For this thesis, criticism can only enrich the understanding of soldier’s images and imaginings in the rhetoric of war. In a magazine that simply praised the war, it would not be especially interesting or consequential that the troops were also supported.

Because the magazine has such a large readership, and critical recognition for its writing, *Newsweek* is an apt representation of mainstream written media. Of course, it is impossible to find a completely neutral news source, but because *Newsweek* strives to please its growing readership there is a clear effort to remain as neutral as possible. When the magazine criticizes the government, it is working to reflect a larger national debate; it features op-ed pieces within

⁷ According to *Newsweek*’s own archives - *Newsweek Magazine* (Archives). “History of *Newsweek*.” Accessed 1 Feb 2011. <http://www.newsweek.com/2007/10/10/history-of-newsweek.html>.

⁸ According to *Newsweek*’s own archives - *Newsweek Magazine* (Archives). “History of *Newsweek*.” Accessed 1 Feb 2011. <http://www.newsweek.com/2007/10/10/history-of-newsweek.html>.

the pages, but cover stories attempt to follow national trends of opinion more closely. What is on the cover represents the magazine as a whole and is the first line for appealing to readers, customers. For this reason, I rely heavily on cover stories. Articles that make the cover are there because they will sell magazines, thus these articles can be bold but not offensive and must attempt to reflect the public's opinions.

For both *Newsweek* and the State of the Union, I restrict my examinations to the beginning years of the Vietnam War and War on Terror: 1963-1966 and 2001-2003. While many compare these conflicts now, at their beginnings they were vastly different. The Vietnam War began as policing after the French had left, in an attempt to prevent a communist takeover, while the War on Terror began in direct response to 9/11. These differences can be seen distinctly in the way that *Newsweek* addresses the wars as will be discussed at length in Chapter Two. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Bush each faced similar tasks in their State of the Union messages as Americans in both periods became increasingly skeptical of these respective wars. The first years of these conflicts are crucial in framing the public's understanding of the war and those who fight it for America.

Significance of the Image of the Soldier to the American Public

Before fully understanding how the State of the Union and *Newsweek Magazine* frame and discuss the soldiers of Vietnam War and the War on Terror, we must first understand why it matters at all what is said about the soldiers. The United States of America has a long history of narratives surrounding what it means to be a soldier within the culture at large. The soldier and

the war have been classically seen as one entity, inseparable from each other, but in more recent history, these concepts have divided in the mainstream media and the perceived public opinion. During the Vietnam War, these terms were still conflated; soldiers were part of the war along with the politicians who sent them to fight.⁹ The soldier was in some way held responsible for being a part, or an agent of the war, though not the cause. Peace was the ideal that soldier and citizen alike wanted to share, and because of this the government struggled to gain support for the war. In the War on Terror, the employment of the phrasing “Support our Troops” by media, politicians and the public has changed the national discourse so that the American people must (at least on a public, patriotic level) agree with at least the support of the individual soldier. Even during the Vietnam War, “for many in the peace movement, the individual soldier was a central and tragic figure, a pawn exploited in the game of power politics” (Coy 168). The War in Vietnam was met with wide protest, sometimes even blaming the soldier for war in part, but Coy asserts that even in this climate, many saw the soldier as victim to war.¹⁰ This pitiable soldier is countered by the brave patriot image which also pervades American culture. These two images work in tandem within politics more than they oppose each other in practice. Showing these opposing roles of the soldier, and employing both as assumed and imposing narratives, Americans must assume both onto the body of every soldier. Seeing that soldier, then, as both hero and victim, makes it much more difficult to question the righteousness or validity of a soldier’s duties. With this idea that the soldier is subject to war, the reasons that politicians and media use the image becomes clearer – the soldier’s role is untouchably patriotic, which makes

⁹ Stahl and Hass both show this in their writings. (Stahl 546) (Hass, 2009, 5-9)

¹⁰ Though the treatment of soldiers remains somewhat unclear from the Vietnam War era, there are instances of protestors lauding, pitying and attacking soldiers. Blame put on the soldier has been seen in many accounts of soldiers coming home in uniform and having protestors, or anti-war advocates yell, spit, etc. at them. An example of this is seen in an interview with Donald White, a former Sergeant in Vietnam. (White 3)

the image ideal for gaining support or accessing emotional sympathy, *and* the soldier's vulnerability in war makes the image sometimes controversial because they require protection.¹¹

National climate and public opinion on the Vietnam War and today's War on Terror construct the narrative persona of the soldier in very different ways. Vietnam was a war met with immense political opposition as troops began to surge in number, but at the beginning stages of the War on Terror, many Americans saw military efforts as justified and retaliatory; therefore, the war was more widely (though not entirely) accepted, or at least understood.¹²

While this discussion of how and why the public supports the troops at all is not in direct correlation with my study of how public and political outlets define and present the soldier, it does inform us as to why these officials and publications have so carefully used the image of soldiers. As the public is perceived to feel empathy for the soldier, the public is also perceived as sensitive to how the soldier is portrayed. Kristin Hass discusses the American public's support for the troops and the political implications of this assumed backing in her upcoming book. Hass' focus is often the requirement of troop support; arguing that troop-support, though outwardly separated from the war, makes it impossible for anti-war Americans to be fully-anti-war because they must be, at least publically, pro-soldier. Hass gives the following example to illustrate the overwhelming notion of troop-support:

“I support the war,” it goes, “it's the troops I'm against.” This [Bill Hicks joke] gets a laugh because, in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the idea

¹¹ It is important to remember also that the perception of the soldier has changed. In Vietnam, troops experienced a different kind of connection to the war than the troops today experience; soldiers today are separated from the wars and from the institutions, policy makers and people with actual power over these conflicts. During the Vietnam War, many people still saw the soldier as an inseparable piece of the war; each soldier represented the war in whole. As the U.S. began fighting the War on Terror, this separation of war and soldier had completed and even become exaggerated; the soldier is a related entity, but certainly not a stand-in for the war, a reminder and not an equivalent.

¹² These perceptions can be traced by examining public texts like newspapers and magazines – i.e. *Newsweek*.

that a person might not support ‘our’ war is palatable in a way that not supporting ‘our’ soldiers at war is not. Supporting the troops has become a commonsense that goes unquestioned. However people in the United States feel about the war in Iraq, they seem to be unambiguous about the troops fighting it. (Hass, 2009, 4)

This separation of the troops from the conflict that may seem automatic is a fairly new construction that allows for greater political freedom for the government as they can require support for the troops who perform the war, regardless of the support for the war itself. This also encourages a confusing of both terms (war and soldier) and the terms of support itself. What this means for citizens, specifically civilians, is that the rhetoric and the perceived homogenous nature of public opinion regarding troop-support creates an environment that discourages anything but supporting the troops.¹³

Public opinion (or at least the perception of this supposedly unified opinion) is the present stage of cultural memory.¹⁴ If individual Americans believe that most Americans believe any one thing at a given moment, then that belief is what will become the cultural memory of the moment. With this opportunity to shape opinion and thus memory and consequently history, the language for the War on Terror continued to use the image of the soldier as a means for gaining at least some support. Essentially, the soldier becomes something sacred because the soldier is a victim and a hero. In order to gain support for a war – especially the War on Terror – the government has tried to erase the failure of Vietnam from the public memory by focusing on the

¹³ “Troops” is used instead of “soldiers” for any number of reasons. Though I do not believe that these terms are fully interchangeable, the discussion of their differences now would only further confuse the understanding of this issue. Because this is meant as a framework for our understanding, I will let “troops” and “soldiers” be equated here. This is also a public campaign which means the less active of the terms is more appealing because it is less closely associated with the actions of war itself.

¹⁴ This, while not directly from the article, is in conversation with Toni Morrison’s article “The Site of Memory,” which discusses cultural memory, trauma and narrative understanding. (Morrison 303)

good and noble wars that preceded it.¹⁵ Separating the soldier from the war allows for a level of support regardless of how people feel about the war. Through this separation, the government is freed from some of the implications and consequences of war. If the soldiers are not a part of the war, than how can any singular politician or administration be at fault either?¹⁶ This is another way that politicians and other public officials can use the soldier. The soldier's image can be used, exploited, taken to free others from guilt.

Chapters

Chapter One analyzes State of the Union addresses from 1963 through 1966 and 2001 through 2003 from Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Bush to understand their framing of the soldier and the war. I will show that the soldiers are absent from the discussion of war unless the president needs to gain his audience's sympathy for support. Thus, the soldiers and their immense sacrifices are presented as a means for justifying financial support for the war. Presidents use the image of the soldier to connect the American public with the war abroad. This connection comes from respect, patriotism and sympathy for the risk being taken by these men and women in uniform. I will also show that when the soldier is present, it is not as an emblem of dominance or violence, rather the soldiers are presented as soberly performing their duties, patriotically putting themselves in harm's way, etc. Except for the few months that immediately follow 9/11, the soldier is not an enactor of war, but a consequence of it. Late 2001 is the only instance of soldiers being shown as enactors of violence, and it is in direct correlation with an easily-defined enemy: Al Qaeda. Other than this moment, where the soldier is absent from the discussion of war, presidents speak of the wars abstractly, conflating the ownership and agents of

¹⁵ "Failure" because America lost the War in Vietnam as opposed to the victories of WWI and WWII.

¹⁶ I will be working to expand this, but I think it will fit into my conclusion rather than introduction.

the wars. Often these wars are called “ours” or “America’s,” and are explained as being fought by “us” or “this government,” which leaves the soldier entirely out of the discussion.¹⁷ This absence confuses the idea of war so that it is no longer anything more than just that – an idea. The specifics of who, what, and how are all left out of the discussion and instead the public is given a vague idea that “we” are somehow fighting evil for the sake of “freedom” everywhere. I will show that this rhetoric, whether leaving the soldier in or taking the soldier out, is pervasive and exploitative to the image of the soldier as it assumes whatever role is politically convenient onto the soldier.

Chapter Two analyzes cover stories from *Newsweek Magazine* for a look into a more informal public sensibility of soldiers and war. I use representations of soldiers and their roles in the wars to discuss the construction of those images. For example, we can see how the public narratives of soldiers deal with their patriotism and heroism by looking at an article that appeared in 2002, shortly after full-scale military operations in Afghanistan had begun.¹⁸ The article follows a group of soldiers who had recently lost many in an enemy stand-off; instead of presenting the bravery of men in battle, the writer shows the bravery of those surrounded by death. The story focuses on the honor code of these men: “American soldiers do not abandon their dead and wounded on the battlefield” (Thomas, 2001, 26). These soldiers are carefully portrayed as bravely endangered, not as gun-slinging killers. *Newsweek* can present soldiers as being a part of the wars they fight without taking a stance on the war if the soldiers are lauded for their sacrifice and heroism in the wake of tragedy. The representation of U.S. soldiers denies and creates the complications of soldiering through such binary appeals of heroic victims.

¹⁷ These various pronouns and agent/owners will be contextualized in Chapter One. Each can be found in a number of quotes to be seen in that chapter.

¹⁸ Previously these efforts were restricted to hunting down bin Laden, but by this point it was considered a war in Afghanistan.

What will prove perhaps most interesting of all, is the tonal shift in the framing of the war and the soldier that occurs in the months which immediately follow 9/11. Because the United States was collectively recovering from the attacks, the first military efforts in Afghanistan were widely supported.¹⁹ These few months, before criticism against President Bush began on a large-scale, are the singular example of soldiers being portrayed as violent or actively performing the efforts of war. The implications of this shift as the war lost support and grew in many ways, are that the war and soldier begin to be framed in ways more similar to Vietnam. In *Newsweek*, the soldier is understood as a professional, a dutiful and respectable American who is simply performing the tasks at hand. I will show that soldiers are being used in the magazine as a way of discussing the war while invoking the public's sympathy.

These chapters aim to understand and dissect some of the narratives that surround soldiers, both within and outside of the war. The men and women (though mostly men) who have fought in wars and come home without a way to understand this new concept of themselves. Because constructions of soldier narratives vary so widely based on the speaker and the audience that the speaker assumes, these narratives are not, in fact, depicting the reality of war or soldiers. These speeches and articles portray soldiers in a way that will (hopefully) please their audiences and gain them support – whether in votes or magazines sold. The reality is not always so easily understood, and when the many ways that soldiers are presented are considered, this complexity becomes all the more apparent. Soldiers are killers, heroes and symbols of war. They are the women and men who children are taught to respect; that protestors target, or exempt; and that politicians depend on. Still, the soldier cannot be so easily defined.

¹⁹ Again, these efforts were largely described as exclusively hunting down bin Laden and other Al Qaeda members.

Politicians use the soldier as a defense mechanism – both literally and figuratively. The soldier is an escape route because supporting the soldier is a seeming American duty, a perceived constant. These public narratives can, again, assume support as a given. Support for the troops complicates, and sometimes pushes itself into support for the war. At the very least, it softens the degree to which any public entity can feel comfortable criticizing the war.

Chapter One:

Finding the Agents of War in State of the Union Addresses

Introduction

We are proud, for example, of Major Rudolf Anderson who gave his life over the island of Cuba. We salute Specialist James Allen Johnson who died on the border of South Korea. We pay honor to Sergeant Gerald Pendell who was killed in Viet-Nam. They are among the many who in this century, far from home, have died for our country. Our task now, and the task of all Americans, is to live up to their commitment. (Kennedy, 1963, 8)

In President John F. Kennedy's 1963 State of the Union address, he breaks from his talk of abstract ideas about national budget and worldwide relations to take a moment to acknowledge three individual soldiers whose lives had been lost in conflicts around the world. Kennedy reminds his audience that there are brave men, far from home, who sacrifice more than most could imagine for their country. This quote does more than highlight the value of the soldier, it also challenges Americans generally: "the task of all Americans is to live up to their [the soldiers'] commitment." Kennedy also suggests that his audience "owes" the soldier as the soldier is working for all Americans, not just for "America" in the abstract – a notion that is not necessarily inaccurate. To create a comparison of the soldier's sacrifice with that of the general population, Kennedy uses the specific image of the soldier, calling these individuals out by name. This highlights what each individual stands to sacrifice in war, pushing both sympathy

and guilt on the American listeners; the sacrifice makes the soldiers special, and especially American. These soldiers are the stand-outs, the exceptionals.

Soldiers have long been emblems of American patriotism, heroism and bravery. “America” trains great militaries, and finds great pride in the memories of World War I and World War II – great battles with great causes.¹ Because this history informs the national understanding and imagination of soldiers, a president can expect that his audience respects, lauds and is proud of the role of the soldier. Framing Americans as having a kind of parental ownership of the soldiers (“we”), he can cause his audience to feel that the soldiers deserve support, and that the soldiers are “owed” the same kind of “commitment” from those at home. In many examples of from State of the Union messages, presidents frame the war and the soldier as “ours,” or as belonging to the American public. The public’s support becomes all the more crucial to victory, if they have ownership of either, or both, the soldier and the war.

Soldiers are thought about, talked about and sent about for all sorts of reasons; the framing of the soldier’s efforts has a special significance and power when the president is the one doing the thinking, talking and sending. In times of war, the State of the Union address has even greater influence as it is one of the president’s most publicized opportunities to frame the conflict and the objective of American involvement. The president has this uninterrupted moment to frame his reasoning, the reasoning behind risking American lives and energies. Presidents, as I will show, take full advantage of this moment to discuss the ways that Americans will be positively affected by a given war’s outcomes. In these addresses, there is often talk of “our” American responsibility to the rest of the world and to the ideas of freedom, democracy and

¹ This is further explained by Kristin Hass in her upcoming book: *Sacrificing Soldiers: War Memorials on the National Mall*.

righteousness. What America owes to the world can be seen in presidential discussions of freedom and democracy in both the Vietnam War and the War on Terror.² This is another way that the idea of an American “we” can be used to access the public’s sympathies for war and the soldiers.

Over the past century, the State of the Union has become an increasingly valued point of communication between the president, Congress and citizens across the nation (Peters 1). The address gives the president an opportunity to reaffirm his role and his decisions with the country. Citizens pause to hear how their president will frame the nation’s military actions, economic climate, social and cultural situations, and foreign affairs. In times of war, these addresses are even more important because they have the power to renew confidence in the nation’s leadership.³

The role of the soldier is often understood as a part of war – the enactor of the actual actions of war; yet, the agency and the enacting of the war itself is often subscribed rhetorically to various subjects in the context of the State of the Union. Sometimes this means that the president is imagining the war in abstract forms, and so describes the efforts of war as being of a government, administration or some other political entity. Other times, the American people are the enactors of the efforts to bring freedom or pass on their own ideals to others – this is another form of abstracting the efforts of war to highlight the value of the outcome over the

² President Johnson discusses this most explicitly in his 1966 State of the Union: (LBJ, 1966, 2).

³ It is not simply the speech which holds a particular status; the office of president itself helps to inspire people to actually listen. Presidents hold this special power because they represent a well-respected and idolized hierarchy: American democracy. As Althusser might explain, American citizens are “always-already subjects” in the ideology of America and as a president, a person has a very influential position within that hierarchy (Althusser 700). His article, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” explains that as people living within an established culture, all Americans are subjects to their perceived American ideology – thus, if Americans think that Americans should support soldiers, patriotism and democratic freedom, they will feel pressured to actually do so (Althusser 695). These speeches have influence because they are presented as influential. As the soldier is concerned, these speeches work to frame an understanding of the wars that these soldiers are fighting. Presidents work to justify, deemphasize and cope with the wars that they fight; soldiers often get lost in the mix.

consequences of the actual fighting. There are also instances of the war being portrayed by presidents as happening within “agencies,” which are said to be seeking out the enemy or pursuing the desired outcomes of war in other ways (Bush, 2003, 6). Not only do these shifting images of who is responsible for the enacting of war change the idea of who is behind war, these shifts also further abstract what the war actually is. When it is unclear what war is actually being fought, or how it is happening, the role of the soldier is diminished, if not entirely lost. Where the soldier is presented in discussions of war, the image is then often used as a means of gaining sympathy for the war with which the soldiers are associated. Because a president can assume the public has sympathy for the sacrifice made by the soldiers, he can utilize that image to gain support for the soldier; framing this support as a means of helping the soldier absolves the public from any conflict they might have about the war as a separate entity.

State of the Union: Views on Vietnam

Throughout the 1960s, the War in Vietnam was a subject of great controversy, which made discussions of it and appealing for its support, whether abstract or fiscal, sensitive for the presidents overseeing the conflict. Unlike the War on Terror, the War in Vietnam has no finite beginning; America’s efforts began as a policing force in the wake of French colonialism, but these efforts eventually blurred into an equally impalpable war.

This confusion leads to rhetoric that complicates the role of America in Vietnam and the status of the soldiers deployed overseas. For example, in President Johnson’s 1964 State of the Union, he mentions the War in Vietnam subtly, saying: “Today, Americans of all races stand

side by side in Berlin and in Viet Nam. They died side by side in Korea. Surely they can work and eat and travel side by side in their own country” (LBJ, 1964, 4). The soldiers in Vietnam and Berlin stand; they are separated from those who “died side by side in Korea.” Johnson is careful to construct a soldier that is above all else American, and can stand, once again, as an example to all Americans. In this case, the soldier’s example is not as focused on the sacrifices made (though the death of those in Korea is acknowledged), but is on the moral value of the soldiers who are willing to perform their duty as a unified front of Americans, regardless of race. Johnson compares this war to the conflicts of American society, which works to ease tensions at home and further frame the war as highly American and moral for its racial unity.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine State of the Union speeches from President Kennedy in 1963, and from President Johnson in 1964, 1965 and 1966 to understand how these presidents are using or excluding the soldiers when they speak of the war. These dates are significant because they allow us to see how the office of the presidency came to understand the Vietnam War; in the mid-1960s, the war was still beginning and the American public was beginning to question American involvement. This informs our comparisons with the War on Terror as America in 2002 mirrors the same pattern – though of course, under different circumstances. From these examinations of the presidents’ presentations of war and the soldiers, we will see how the presidents work to shape public imagination of America’s role and the soldier’s work in Vietnam. Soldiers are often removed from the dialogue of war, and thus when the soldier is mentioned, it is with purpose and emphasis. Where the soldier is present, the president seeks to access the public’s sympathies and respect for the soldiers, but when the soldier is absent from the discussion of war, the agent of war is replaced or abstracted away.

To reiterate, while presidents often resist speaking directly of soldiers, the soldiers cannot be entirely left out as a reality of war. Thus, when the soldier is dealt with, presidents carefully present a picture of the soldier for the public's imagination. Presidents frame the soldiers as being "ours," as a group owned by the ever-present American "we." To demonstrate this, I return to a quote previously referenced at the beginning of this chapter from President Kennedy in his 1963 State of the Union address as he is discussing the war:

We are proud, for example, of Major Rudolf Anderson who gave his life over the island of Cuba. We salute Specialist James Allen Johnson who died on the border of South Korea. We pay honor to Sergeant Gerald Pendell who was killed in Viet-Nam. They are among the many who in this century, far from home, have died for our country. Our task now, and the task of all Americans is to live up to their commitment. (Kennedy, 1963, 8)

Here, Kennedy presents these soldiers as active participants in the war, capable of the ultimate commitment to their country: sacrificing their lives for their country on enemy territory.

However, even in doing so, President Kennedy is not giving the soldiers agency or political power in these conflicts because the only actions we see from them are sacrifice and death.

Additionally, this text is also a challenge to the people outside of the war, outside of the danger of dying, too because Kennedy asks that Americans "live up to their commitment." Kennedy highlights that Americans are proud of soldiers ("we are proud," "we salute") and thus Americans pay honor ("we pay honor") to the men who put themselves in harm's way.

Essentially, this passage praises what these men have done and suggests that because they "died for this country," their sacrifice was honorable. If the work and sacrifice is honorable, it may also suggest that the cause of war, rather than simply America, is also honorable. This association of pride and honor with soldiers' commitment and deaths lends itself to slippery line

of reasoning: if the soldier is honorable for dying, how can the cause they died for *not* be honorable too?

These specific references to Anderson, Johnson and Pendell highlight the role of the soldier as an individual, but also maintain an American framing because the “we” is still at the forefront of this imagining; “we” are the agents who have the opportunity to be “proud.” If the public is responsible for honor and pride, it is emotionally responsible for maintaining a prideful imagining of the soldier. “We” are asked, if not required, to feel a certain way about the soldier, which limits how the war is then imagined. If the soldier is dying for and in the war (and for “us”), then the war must have some justifiable cause.

In the passage, Kennedy attempts to speak for all Americans in lauding these men for their sacrifice to the country, to the “us” of which he speaks. Instead of simply focusing on Vietnam, President Kennedy presents exemplars from other conflicts – South Korea and Cuba – which serve to equate these moments, these sacrifices as simply exemplary of American “commitment.” At the time, Cuba and South Korea were still relatively recent incidents, still fresh in public memory as examples of American action, with specific results and reasons. These elements, taken together, elicit the public’s support of the soldiers and move the public towards an understanding and support of the war as well. Kennedy carefully explains what has been given for the cause – life. He asks his audience to “live up” to that sacrifice. By presenting his audience with the losses of these patriotic soldiers in the name of their country, Kennedy suggests that the sacrifice is too great to be contested; in turn, this means that the cause itself, or the war, is also too great to be contested.

In the State of Union, the president often frames the American people as the active agents of ideological, abstracted war, which gives both ownership and agency of the war to the public, while erasing the actual role of the soldier. In the previous example, President Kennedy frames the public as having ownership of the soldier, and thus responsibility for the soldier's participation and treatment in war. Here, President Johnson frames the war itself as owned and performed by the American people in abstract political terms. In his 1964 State of the Union, Johnson refers to historical moments of victory, to a beloved dead president and to the importance of the American people, or "we."⁴

[W]e must maintain... military safety and superiority... both the quality and the quantity of our strategic, our conventional, and our anti-guerilla forces. In 1964 we will be better prepared than ever before to defend the cause of freedom, whether it is threatened by outright aggression or by the infiltration practiced by those in Hanoi and Havana, who ... foment insurrection. (LBJ, 1964, 5)

Similar to President Kennedy's framing of the war in his 1963 State of the Union, this quotation from President Johnson posits American ownership of the efforts of war. Here, instead of the soldier being directly discussed as "ours," the president presents "our strategic, our conventional, and our anti-guerilla forces," which lumps government, citizen and soldier together in the war effort. Additionally, "forces" is a softer term for discussing soldiers, as its more generic nature eliminates a sense of the individual soldier, and puts the focus on the greater category of military generally. President Johnson tells his audience that the "safety" of those fighting the war is dependent on the public's willingness to support and maintain the needs of those "forces." Here, Johnson suggests that American support is required to fight and win the war; the soldier is

⁴ 1964 is Johnson first State of the Union address after Kennedy's assassination.

pushed from importance in favor of the “our” of all Americans. The support of the soldier is crucial, but it remains unclear what the soldier’s concrete actions are. Johnson says that “We... defend the cause of freedom.” Who is “we?” It does not seem that this “we” refers to soldiers or “forces,” rather this “we” stands for the American public and government working together to support the war and the efforts of “defend[ing] the cause of freedom.” As with most State of the Union addresses, “we” comes to stand for all of the American people, for every member of Congress – essentially, for anyone and everyone - and this all-inclusive ownership pushes the agency of the war onto the idea of America and out of the realm of the soldier. The soldier exists in reality, but “our” war is an abstraction.

Directly following the quote above, President Johnson continues: “And *we* must continue to use that strength as [President Kennedy] used it in the Cuban crisis and for the test ban treaty-- to demonstrate both the futility of nuclear war and the possibilities of lasting peace” (LBJ, 1964, 5, emphasis added). Though this quote does not deal directly with the War in Vietnam, the pronominal usage continues to push the government together with the people as a singular entity that can continue the efforts of war as a symbol of American strength. Johnson is dealing with a nation that is facing war and the recent assassination of JFK; blurring the demarcation between public and public official creates a unity that gives agency to all. He also is careful to say “we” when discussing the issue because it furthers this idea of unity. Finally, President Johnson usage of “that strength” instead of “our” suggest that the violence implied in “strength” is actually outside of “our” control.

The soldiers, whether named individually or referred to as “forces” or troops, are certainly a part of the war, but in these passages they are shown as secondary to public support. While this does not necessarily claim that the soldier is not active in the war, it does reframe the

public as the agent in war. The presidents depict the soldiers as a piece of the war that the public must understand and support – both fiscally and in their sympathies.

With the framing that the agents of this political, ideological war are the American people, or “we,” presidents must continue to present the war favorably even when the terms are more specific to war itself: violence, death and the value of killing. Instead of presenting the action of war as occurring between men, the government as an abstraction in itself takes over the action of this now abstract war. President Johnson presents soldiers, and the ground-level war that they represent, as the last resort of peaceful diplomacy, which frames the soldier as being part of the breakdown of political efforts of peace, and this framing also puts limits on the agency and action of the soldier. In Johnson’s 1966 State of the Union message, he underscores the American government’s attempts at peacefully preventing this war, preventing the deployment of soldiers in Vietnam. Johnson says:

We have also made it clear... that there are no arbitrary limits to our search for peace. We stand by the Geneva Agreements... We will meet at any conference table, we will discuss any proposals--four points or fourteen or forty--and we will consider the views of any group. We will work for a cease-fire now... We will respond if others reduce their use of force, and we will withdraw our soldiers once South Vietnam is securely guaranteed the right to shape its own future. (LBJ, 1966, 2)

Before presenting the idea of soldiers, of force, or even the specificity of naming Vietnam at all, the president gives his audience abstractions and images to display his efforts for peace; instead of first presenting the inevitability of war and/or military action. Johnson assures his listeners that “we” (in this case, “we” stands for national government) are working for peace through

diplomacy. He calls the government's efforts "our search for peace," this abstraction begins with the American government performing a search with "no arbitrary limits." Next, while "the Geneva Agreements" are a specific set of guidelines for order and not simply a listing of abstract ideals, their global reach still leaves the audience with abstract notions, rather than concrete actions. Moving then to "conference table[s]" and "proposals," grounds the images more concretely with contained pictures of officials sitting at tables – diplomatic discussions. Again, this is emphasizing efforts of peace, but it is also highlighting that the American government is the agent who works to stop the action, not begin or enact it. Finally, President Johnson explains that "we" will replace the "force" that others might reduce, suggesting that his audience understands this "force" as representing the entirety of military action, soldiers, and anything else wrapped into the efforts of war. Johnson frames America being a finisher and not an instigator of these efforts by saying that America will "replace" those who leave. Johnson believes that "we" are doing this ("replac[ing]") in order to keep peace, even if peace must be kept with "force." By the time Johnson uses the word "soldiers" his audience has been slowly worked down a ladder of abstract images and ideas about peace and diplomacy, slowly gaining specificity. This movement presents soldiers as an unfavorable last resort of an otherwise peaceful government. The issue here is not if soldiers are the agents of war; here the soldier's presence represents a breakdown of diplomacy. If the soldier is present, there is war. If there is war, the government's efforts for peace, for diplomacy have failed. The soldier's role becomes a secondary ramification of the failing of others. Thus, the soldier is not a force of war, but a force of freedom that results from diplomacy's failure.

We can also explore another reading of this passage – it is also true that Johnson's framing of the soldiers as a last option can be read as Johnson being protective of them. This

reading does not contradict my previous claims; it actually informs the same line of thinking on soldiers. If Johnson is leaving the soldiers as a final option, he is not just resisting violence being enacted *by* America and Americans; he is resisting having violence enacted *on* America and Americans. He shows himself as protective of the soldiers who are “ours,” by taking ownership and resisting their deployment. He presents himself as sympathetic by suggesting that the war is something he could not have prevented; just like the soldiers’ lack of choice, America had to go to war. Both readings of this passage present the soldier as being free from political agency, as being a result of diplomatic failures. Both passages also show that the government is resisting blame by using the soldier as a final option.

As President Johnson continues to discuss this idea of “we” with his American audience, he is also careful to emphasize that Americans on Vietnamese soil are not intruders, but liberators. Framing the war efforts as liberating actions presents the soldiers as agents of freedom, rather than of war. This is the same kind of language that we will come to see in the Bush Administration. In his 1966 address, President Johnson says:

The people of Vietnam should make a free decision on the great question of reunification... This is all we want for South Vietnam. It is all [they] want. And if there is a single nation on this earth that desires less than this for its own people, then let its voice be heard. (LBJ, 1966, 2)

Johnson argues that the people of Vietnam deserve the same freedom that Americans enjoy; this strategy highlights the end results of the war, and not the current and inevitable actions of the war to come. He also assures his audience that the Vietnamese actually “want” these American values, and implicitly support the efforts of the American government and its military. Soldiers

are, thus, a site of patriotism, rather than active violence; this war is a search for peace, and not death after all.

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson both use the State of the Union as an opportunity to frame the war and America's role in Vietnam. They each work to present the war as working towards a better world – helping the people of Vietnam. Speaking of the war abstractly allows them to frame the war as being a war of ideas: American ideals fighting for freedom. When the war is understood abstractly, the soldier's role is harder to define. The war itself becomes a fight for freedom, so the soldiers are understood as liberators, givers of freedom and not enactors of the violence of war. Often, when the war is discussed, the presidents simply leave the soldiers out of the discussion so that more abstract groups of people become the agents of war; public imagination of the war is pushed into more and more abstract terms. The State of the Union becomes a way to imagine Vietnam as an idea; that idea leaves little room for the concrete actions of war, of the soldier.

State of the Union: Views on Terror

As with the Vietnam War era, State of the Union addresses from the beginning years of the War on Terror are used by presidents to describe and frame the war and its agents – whether these agents are the soldiers, the government or the American public. President George W. Bush is, of course, dealing with a different situation in the realm of public opinion as most Americans were receptive to a military response after the attacks of September 11th. Though this public support quickly diminished, Bush had to continue to establish the reasons and need for the war.

Support for the war is not a given, but support for the soldiers and for the ideals of America are, and similarly President Bush uses those common tropes to appeal the efforts of the war.

President Bush constructs similar patterns when discussing war, and its agents in his State of the Union addresses. Where the soldier is present it is to appeal to people's sympathy and patriotic ideals; where the war is discussed without soldiers, it is abstracted so that the agents of war become the American people, the government and its agencies or no one at all. These abstractions allow the war to be spoken of without invoking images of the human costs of war. Giving the ownership of the war to the whole of the American people makes the conflict a war of ideals and ideas instead of one that can occur in combat zones or with weaponry. In all this complicates the role of the soldier, or outright erases it.

Continuing this search for the agents of war leads to President Bush's 2002 State of the Union, in which Bush presents the need for action, paired with the presence of threats to America's safety; yet he leaves these statements, except for one, free of agents. While the overall message of this passage is fairly normal for President Bush – threats to America's safety paired with the need for action – this quote is particularly interesting because it speaks of action passively. This passivity de-emphasizes American involvement in the enacting of this action, while speaking more abstractly of its need. Bush explains that action is needed, that “we” the people are threatened, but he does not say who will have to perform these actions. Bush, instead, presents the actions of war, or aggression, as abstract ideas which softens their intensity, but also erases the role of those actually performing the war – the soldiers. He says:

The next priority... is to do everything possible to protect our citizens and strengthen our Nation [*sic*] against the ongoing threat of another attack. Time and distance from the events of September the 11th will not make us safer unless we act on its lessons... We are

protected from attack only by vigorous action abroad and increased vigilance at home.

(Bush, 2002, 3)

Bush eliminates agents here in order to speak of these “threats” and “vigorous actions” more abstractly. He begins with “*The next priority*” instead of “Our...” or “My...” and this omission of subject leaves the discussion to ideas, instead of agents. He tells his listeners that they, “we,” must be protected, but he gives no definition to who might perform that protection; the protection is an abstraction, not related to military or even intelligence agencies here. The phrase, “unless *we* act,” is the only pronominal usage with agency, but precisely *who* should do *what* is still vague. His audience does not know if they are to act, if he will act, or if he is speaking of some other institution of America – whether military, government or more abstract. As he defines what ought to be done to protect “us,” which is the vague, but bold: “vigorous action,” there is no agent here. The audience is only told that action is happening, not who is doing it. There is the presentation that something – vague, abstract something – is being done to protect Americans, but Americans are not told who is fighting this battle. There is no place for the soldier here; there is no space for anyone at all.

As Presidents Johnson and Kennedy spoke of the war and the its agents in various ways, President Bush also abstracts the idea of war to create new active agents of a newly ideological or abstracted war. Again, the American people, the government and other abstract groups are presented as political agents of a war of ideas – committing war within the realm of values. The soldiers are depicted as victims of violence, as patriots, as vulnerable youths, but not as enactors of real physical violence. Each president portrays the soldier as participatory, yet blameless in these wars.

For these wartime presidents (Bush especially), soldiers, rather the idea of the soldier, is utilized as a means of gaining support through pity and pride. President Bush, like Kennedy and Johnson, often presents soldiers as “ours,” and as “ours,” they are a representation of the finest in American bravery and “we” owe them for their sacrifices.⁵ This does more than simply ground the war as American and as something that all Americans can and ought to participate in, it also gives Americans the responsibility of making sure that the war is properly fought and funded. If these are “our” soldiers, “we” owe them. An example of Bush gaining support for the war from the image of the soldier comes from his 2002 address:

It costs a lot to fight this war... Afghanistan proved that expensive precision weapons defeat the enemy and spare innocent lives, and we need more of them. We need to... make our military more agile to put our troops anywhere in the world quickly and safely. Our men and women in uniform deserve the best... (Bush, 2002, 3)

President Bush is letting the American people own the efforts of the military as a whole, which puts the responsibility of success on funding, and not diplomatic or human efforts. He gains specificity as he proceeds, first telling his audience “our military,” then “our troops,” and finally “our men and women in uniform,” in order to humanize the need for funding. He does not speak of violence against American and he only says that Americans are “defeat[ing] the enemy,” which implies violence but gives no specificity of agents. Where violence is present, the soldier is removed as if the soldier’s job is avoiding violence, or danger. Simultaneously, there is someone whose job is to “defeat the enemy,” but Bush gives only vague agents, “we” and “our military,” who might be enacting this violence. Bush emphasizes that the soldiers are threatened

⁵ This use of “our soldiers/troops” is seen even in the next quote and gives the whole of America ownership over all the efforts of the war and the soldier.

by reminding his audience that this funding would help to move “our troops... quickly and safely.” This presents the soldier as someone to pity, someone who needs the help of the American people instead of focusing on what any specific roles are. The emphasis is not on the necessity of military action, instead these are separate entities which each require support. Bush is creating a space for the troops which makes them belong to the American “we.” This leaves the agent as an abstraction, as if all of America collectively fights wars and protects worldwide democracy. This framing conflates the roles of domestic support, funding, ideals and soldiering; Bush makes “us” all responsible for the war as a whole, for what “our” soldiers are doing.

In the same way that President Bush introduces American responsibility, he also works to inspire Americans to be proud of the efforts that America is making to defeat those that hurt the nation. He also highlights historical American exceptionalism:

This Nation can lead the world in sparing innocent people from a plague of nature. And this Nation is leading the world in confronting and defeating the manmade evil of international terrorism. The war goes on, and we are winning. (Bush, 2003, 4)

This framing gives credit to all of America for the wars of the past. There are no soldiers involved in the “confronting and defeating” in this case. While putting responsibility on America for the well-being of itself and its worldwide allies, Bush is also repeating that America is being threatened. By pairing these together, President Bush shows that America should be protective and defensive. Bush presents his audience with abstractions of war that are barely physical; he focuses on the idea that the idea of America is fighting.

In his 2002 State of the Union, President Bush says, “Our war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun,” which frames the war as being owned, somehow performed, by all Americans

(Bush, 2002, 3). Bush presents this war to all in the same way that all Americans experienced the trauma of September 11th; he gives his nation the opportunity to participate, to own this war of retribution. What this also does, though, is create a space in which all people are enacting the actions of this war, instead of supporting or acknowledging the individuals who are actually sent to the front to actively perform war. The soldier is left out of this understanding of war.

President Bush emphasizes a history of American efforts for freedom and safety, calling on his audience to remember the nation's past wars – Johnson uses this same tool in dealing with the War in Vietnam. He frames the war as being a classic trope of Americanism. To fight this war is to be American. Certainly, it can be argued that a war is a national battle, occurring on diplomatic as well as battle fronts, but this framing forgets the role of the soldier.

Now, in this century, the ideology of power and domination has appeared again and seeks to gain the ultimate weapons of terror. Once again, this Nation and all our friends are all that stand between a world at peace and a world of chaos and constant alarm. Once again, we are called to defend the safety of our people and the hopes of all mankind. And we accept this responsibility. (Bush, 2003, 5)

Not only is Bush reminding Americans of their rich national history of war, he is calling upon them to live up to that memory. Because “this Nation” has a history of warring for peace, Bush wants to inspire the nation to do just that again. Bush says, “this Nation and all our friends,” emphasizing once again that America is a “we,” a nation that works as a whole. In this idea of wholeness, all are responsible for the fighting, supporting and success of this war. If all are abstractly fighting the war, there is little room left for the specific role of the soldier. Along with forgetting this role, the framing forgets to explain that in order to “defend the safety” of

Americans and “the hopes of all mankind” a war, a violent war must be fought. Someone will have to perform this active defense; yet, there is no soldier present in this statement to do so. The soldier is absent, but the battle is not.

In this rhetoric, soldiers are replaced as the war is thought of abstractly. The president does not only replace the soldier with the American people, he also presents the government and its various agencies as being the active parties of war. This can be seen in President Bush’s 2003 State of the Union address; he says:

We have the terrorists on the run... the terrorists are learning the meaning of American justice. As we fight this war, we will remember where it began: Here, in our own country. This Government is taking unprecedented measures to protect our people and defend our homeland. (Bush, 2003, 5)

According to Bush, “we” are fighting the war, “we” are battling the terrorists, and “we” are responsible for acting on our memories. In his next sentence, President Bush defines this “we” as “[t]his government,” meaning that the government is responsible for all these tasks. While this is abstractly true, it pushes the soldier further from the image of war, the image of fighting. This abstraction replaces the soldier so that they are not the important agents of war; Bush uses the whole of the American people to stand in – this leaves the soldier, and the actuality of the war that is being fought in completely abstract terms.

Later in this same address from 2003, President Bush describes what is being done to stop further attacks by terrorist organizations and to retaliate against those who caused 9/11. Bush speaks about the government as being responsible for the enacting of this work; presenting the action as coming from the government and its agencies leaves the idea abstract and, again,

leaves no place for the soldier. Bush continues to describe the war as occurring on a governmental level – notice who is doing and owning what. President Bush says:

Since September the 11th, *our* intelligence and law enforcement *agencies* have worked more closely than ever to track and disrupt the terrorists... *Our* war against terror is a contest of will in which perseverance is power. (Bush, 2003, 6, emphasis added)

President Bush is describing serious actions being taken against terrorists, but instead of speaking of soldiers, or even the military, he gives his audience an image of that action which includes the government and its “agencies” alone. These “agencies” are doing the public work of the war, and not the soldiers. This framing discourages Americans to think of soldiers giving their lives or being put in harm’s way and makes the war seem manageable, occurring with the reasonable realm of “our intelligence and law enforcement agencies.”

Conclusion

Throughout the Vietnam War and War on Terror eras, presidents attempted to frame these wars as abstract entities that have forced America to defend itself and its ideals. Thus, the soldiers who fight in these wars are presented by wartime presidents as still brave and sacrificing, but also as emblems of American duty more so than active representations of American force. These men and women perform work that deserves to be lauded, but their efforts are framed in these speeches as being more passive. The soldier’s image can be used to gain public support even for a controversial war, because the soldier is established as a brave, yet

pitiable American entity – highly patriotic, proud and occasionally tragic. Accordingly, presidents do not wish to emphasize that the soldiers are especially violent or especially endangered. When the soldiers are spoken of as in danger, wartime presidents assure the public in the State of the Union addresses that though there must be sacrifice, there are soldiers who can survive and come home – but that is dependent on *if* the public funds or supports them properly.⁶ The measure of success is pushed upon the American public; the public must support the soldier, must see their part in owning these American wars. The public is given the agency of these wars in the presidents’ framing, and so the soldier is lost more and more in the public understanding of war. Yes, the soldier is a site of great pride in the American imagination. Yes, these soldiers are presented respectfully by the President. Yet, these soldiers are not presented as enactors of the violence of war; they are depicted as being part of the abstract goals of war: liberators, defenders, or even as those who prevent further violence.⁷ Conflating and exploiting the role of the soldier complicates, and may even erase the image of the soldier from the public’s understanding of war.

⁶ Presidents work to inspire hope for survival, but do not deny that some will die in war. I do not mean to imply that presidents are working to completely deny that there is death in war, but rather that they wish to emphasize what is more hopeful, less costly in war.

⁷ As seen in the previously quoted: “Once again, we are called to defend the safety of our people and the hopes of all mankind. And we accept this responsibility” (Bush, 2003, 5).

Chapter Two:

Newsweek Magazine Covers the War and the Soldier

Introduction

From Tea Party revolutions, to school board meetings, and all the way to CNN and FOX News, civilians use public forums and public press to express their beliefs, concerns and critiques of political and social culture; whether these expressions are sensible or not, they are particularly *American* sentiments because of their public nature. *Newsweek Magazine* is a useful example of these popular expressions of opinion and news; with a large readership and many awards for exceptional journalism, *Newsweek Magazine* is well-known and well-received. Though *Newsweek* is not a magazine written by *everyman*, it does attempt to write for the everyman audience. This means that *Newsweek*, as an entity, does not wish to be too controversial so as not to abandon any demographics of possible readers. Because of this clear interest in the happiness of their readers, *Newsweek* can be seen as a measure of public opinion in some way. The magazine has to appeal enough to be bought, so it is concerned about its own appeal. This same principle applies to the magazine's coverage on the Vietnam War, especially the cover stories. In both the Vietnam and the War on Terror eras, *Newsweek Magazine* works to present soldiers as humans in battle, instead of agents of battle. The magazine uses human interest stories about what the soldiers are going through in the war, highlighting their personal sacrifices and bravery on the front.

In the 1960s, *Newsweek Magazine* covered the War in Vietnam, of course, but did so without great frequency. This infrequency paired with the controversial nature of the Vietnam War could suggest that *Newsweek* avoided printing cover stories about the war in response to the controversy. Cover stories are the most prominent feature of any magazine, and thus hold a special discursive power with the public. Within its pages and away from immediate sight, *Newsweek* covered the Vietnam War each week, but rarely dealt directly with soldiers. Less often still, the magazine featured stories of soldiers on its cover. In the early 2000s, *Newsweek Magazine* featured stories that dealt directly with the war itself, but there were still considerably fewer articles and cover stories about the actual soldiers of the war. As the War on Terror began in the wake of September 11th, national public opinion had some consensus about taking action against terror, however vague that concept. This is not to say that everyone in America wanted or approved of the war; rather, many people saw discernable, seemingly transparent reasons for the war, reasons for taking action.¹ During the Vietnam War era, there was significantly more confusion about why America was involved and what America wanted from the war.²

The War on Terror began as a direct response to the attacks of Al Qaeda on September 11th, but as time passed the war became more and more abstracted and the enemy more unclear.³ This confusion led to a breaking down of the public's understanding of war. The public was given less and less specific information, and became increasingly wary of what the results might actually be – this wariness is reflected in the types of stories that begin to be published in the spring of 2002. In 2002, stories begin to appear in *Newsweek* that criticize President Bush for his

¹ By 2011, this consensus is longer present, but as the War on Terror began, people were supporting it more readily and more publically than what was seen in the Vietnam era.

² America, here, can be thought of as “America,” the ideological entity.

³ *Newsweek* will come to show that most of America was behind the actions in the first few months after September 11th. As the Bush Administration increased American presence in the Middle East, and redefined the enemy to include all terrorism and not just Al Qaeda, public opinion began to diminish. Again, this can be seen in coverage of the Bush Administration by *Newsweek* – “What Bush Knew” and other articles.

policies on war, and even for how he handled September 11th, 2001. Perhaps most notably, the cover story, “What Bush Knew” outlines the possibility that Bush and his administration could have prevented the attacks if they had been more diligent with the intelligence given (Hirsh 30-31). This kind of criticism, though stunted by the moment of national unity caused by the tragedy of 9/11, grew as the war itself grew.

This moment in late 2001, in which the war was generally supported and seen as justified in its responsiveness, provides us with a unique opportunity to see change in how both the war and the soldier are seen in national opinion. The soldiers are at first are presented by *Newsweek* as brave men in moments of action. As 2002 begins, and the military action against terrorism becomes the War on Terror, the soldiers are depicted as brave men (yes, still brave), now found after the action of war or when the action has brought out new qualities in them – their sense of courage, their sacrifice, or their care for each other. This shift suggests that when Americans are generally feeling “gung-ho” about the war or conflict, the soldier is presented as a site of the violence that America is justly enacting.⁴ However, when the war or conflict becomes more controversial, more abstract or nuanced, the soldier can, and often is used as a means of sympathy – a means of accessing the war without being political. Generally, the soldier is described as wholly moral and American, victim to the environment of war, instead of a participant in the horror. The role of the soldier changes based on what the public thinks (or rather, is being perceived as thinking) of the war effort as a whole.

War often creates sensitive climates for public opinion; a magazine like *Newsweek* must be cautious in what they say and advertise so as not to offend their readership. While the articles written about soldiers may include moments of battle and pieces of war, they attempt to remain

⁴ “Gung-ho” borrowed from the August 1, 1966 article, “Men at War.”

somewhat apolitical – the stories of soldiers are strictly of soldiers, and not editorials on the conditions (physically and legislatively) of war. This separation of soldier from the war does more than humanize the ideas wrapped up in wars, battles and soldiering; it also presents the public with pieces of war that deserve empathy and respect. The stories give their readers something to be proud of, instead of something to debate.

***Newsweek* in the 1960s: What *Newsweek* Said About the War**

The War in Vietnam began slowly, pieces fell into place as the public watched and tried to understand. *Newsweek* covered this issue from the beginning – discussing and debating the implications of war, the consequences of policies and the value of involvement. In this era, the magazine presented many sides of the issue so as to remain neutral as a whole.⁵ Yet, even as the war, in all its stages, was discussed, the soldiers were left out of the debate. In this period, it takes until April 11, 1966 for *Newsweek* to publish a cover story that explicitly deals with soldiers at all. This story, “The Draft,” dissects the draft process and the experience of men in basic training; here, these are not “men at war,” they are boys training for war.⁶ This article spends little time on what the soldiers will actually be doing in combat, and rather what they will do in the meantime. Four months later, on August 1, 1966, *Newsweek Magazine* published another cover story about soldiers, but this time the story deals with men who are on the front

⁵ There is certainly still a bias present, but the magazine is making an attempt at neutrality – further seen by the fact that most articles (except for editorials) have no author, and are instead endorsed by a team of editors. The editors’ names can only be found near the table of contents in the front of the issue in a small list, which attributes no specific writers or teams to the articles themselves.

⁶ Coming from the title of the coming article, “Men at War,” from August 1, 2011.

and actually at war.⁷ These are the two most explicit attempts at representing soldiers that *Newsweek* publishes in the period. There was not a complete resistance on the publication's part to publishing stories on Vietnam at all – the magazine covered the Vietnam War quite often on its cover and constantly on the interior pages. These articles typically spoke of soldiers in only quantitative language and not as individuals or examples. Before delving deeply into these two cover stories, I provide an overview of *Newsweek's* Vietnam-centered cover stories from the period in order to give a sense of what was being discussed and published.

The Vietnam War, and the situation which lead to its fruition, were often discussed and explained in the pages of *Newsweek* throughout the 1960s; though, for my studies, I will now turn to the cover stories that deal with the War in Vietnam directly. On November 11, 1963, *Newsweek* runs its first cover story on the coming war. The article is titled, “Vietnam: The Showdown – General Duong Van Minh,” and discusses what is and ought to be done to diplomatically prevent conflict and communism from spreading. At this point, the Americans present in Vietnam were not considered to be engaged in war, but rather to be peacefully policing and oversight – this story deals only with the government officials and their roles in the conflict. In these early years, 1963 to 1964, there is far more coverage on Kennedy (from his administration, to family, and his assassination) and European affairs than Vietnam, with only this single title appearing on the cover (Crinkley Bottom Books 1-9).

After this absence from 1963 to 1964, on January 18, 1965, the story “Vietnam: Any Way Out? – Ambassador Taylor and General Khanh” appears on the cover as a voice of national concern and dissent against the Vietnam War and its seemingly endless reaches into American budgets, and bodies(Crinkly Bottom Books 7). While the article does want to question the value

⁷ This article will be discussed in detail later in this section. It is titled: “Men at War.”

of the war, explaining the losses suffered by the nation, it does not deal with any actual soldiers. The reader is simply presented with the loss of life abstractly. At this point, *Newsweek Magazine* appears to be responding to the national climate by voicing these questions. Just as the magazine had been avoiding making claims about the war before this, the editors are still responsible gauging national interests and approval before they run stories that are possibly controversial. The editors have an economic interest in pleasing the majority.

A month later, on February 22, 1965, the cover story is titled simply, “Vietnam.” Again, this story is detailing the political scene of the moment; the article does not describe the state of the soldiers to its audience at all. Later, in April, the cover story is a profile of the Viet Cong, who are not the American soldiers, but the Vietnamese.⁸ That same year, in July, the Vietnam coverage is more hopeful, “Vietnam: The New War – General Westmoreland” but it also remembers a previous, and ever-present distrust of the leadership. “Vietnam: The Bombers Go North” is the next title we see on the cover, which comes from February of 1966. *Newsweek’s* framing is still suspicious of tactics and reasons in Vietnam, yet remains somewhat neutral in their reporting. Finally, the first look at American soldiers in the field to make the cover is August 1, 1966 – an article called “Men at War.”

These articles show that *Newsweek* was well aware of the national climate surrounding the Vietnam War; the public was worried and conflicted about American involvement, so *Newsweek* reflects the sentiments of its readers. When dealing with a readership that may disagree with the war and may not support the efforts of the national government, bringing the soldier into these articles accesses a part of the war that can still tap into the public’s emotional

⁸ While a deeper understanding of this article would certainly inform this thesis, the archives are incomplete before 1975 – archives including: *Newsweek’s* own, the University of Michigan’s and many other explored sources (for example, www.ebay.com). Thus, although I attempted to secure it, a complete copy of this particular edition could not be obtained.

sympathies through the image of individuals who have the most at stake in war. The soldier is not controversial the same way that a war can be – they are not political agents, and though they are an active force in war, they are not the driving force behind it. As a business, *Newsweek* must respond to its readership, thus if the readership is not supportive of the war, they must keep soldiers somewhat separate from the war to speak of them at all. Thus, *Newsweek* discusses soldiers in training camps, or speaking of how they feel about where they are and what they are doing. Soldiers are not presented here as enactors of violence or war at all, rather as men put into a dutiful post, a job that they must do for America, as Americans. When soldiers are brought into the rhetoric of war, it accesses people's sentimentality – soldiers are seen as deserving of support and pride. When the soldier is present, and discussed in conjunction with the war, it becomes harder to dissent against it.

On April 11, 1966, *Newsweek* features its first Vietnam-era cover story on soldiers, called simply "The Draft." Young men, all over America were dealing with the constant threat of going to war, and this article shows men who have succumb to their duty; they are not valiantly running into war, but respectfully unresisting of becoming soldiers. The article explains the process of the draft, its resistors and statistics ("The Draft" 30-31). The reader sees what it is like to be drafted and put into basic training. Young men are followed from the moment they arrive at training camp with long hair, "carrying overnighters, wearing glazed expressions..." ("The Draft" 31). In camp, they are broken down and built up into soldiers, until finally they are, "ship[ped] out – for more training" ("The Draft" 31). These are the "brave" men who will actually stay and to fight the War in Vietnam, but for risk of exposing the readership to the danger of being a soldier, the article shows them before this war-time bravery is necessary ("The

Draft” 31). Instead, the article focuses on the abstract notions of soldiering, the initial sacrifice of going to basic training.

Much of the story also details the efforts of dodgers – those who have attempted to get out of service through education, lying or even “forged Air Force Reserves and National Guard papers that were to make them ‘undraftable’” (“The Draft” 30). In the article, dodgers are framed as ingenious in their efforts for cowardice, but also as clueless of their impact. Figure 1, which is a cartoon from the article, depicts a young draft dodger is shown as who is foolish enough to burn a credit card, rather than a draft card, by mistake; the dodger also needs assistance, both with the care of his vehicle and the payment for their service. He is portrayed as foolish and he does not seem to have a mature understanding of the world around him. These are cowardly young men because as they refuse to serve, or beat the system to get exemptions, other men will have to replace them and those men might have families and other circumstances that would require greater sacrifice (“The Draft” 30-31).⁹ The story highlights that those who accept their duty are brave young men; still the focus is mostly on what is given up in going to war.



Figure 1: *Newsweek* Cartoon, April 11, 1966¹⁰

⁹ Men also attempted to get out of the draft by: faking insanity, taking particularly strange drugs, eating cotton, faking and/or causing minor injuries, feigning/exaggerating homosexuality, acting as pacifists, falsifying documents, and any number of other ways. A satirical book called, “1001 Ways to Beat the Draft,” published in 1967, outlines some actual and far-fetched ways to do just that.

“You’ll Need to Know This if You’re in Vietnam,” is a smaller, one-page article found within the text of “The Draft,” which focuses on the relationship between men in basic training and their sergeants – the importance of this relationship for teaching the young men how to be soldiers. The article aims to speak of these young soldiers as students, not warriors. The writer emphasizes their youth is repeatedly in descriptions, and the storytelling itself. The writer reminds his audience that the average ages for draftees were 18, 19 and 20 (“You’ll Need to Know This if You’re in Vietnam” 33). Drill sergeant are described as being more like “mother hens” than ever before because they are dealing with such a young, and educated force (“You’ll Need to Know This if You’re in Vietnam” 33). This is not to say that other wars did not have young soldiers, but this article carefully portrays them as innocents in the school of war. For example, basic training is described as “baptismal” and along with the “mother hen” comparison, the sergeants’ hats are described as “Smokey Bear garrison hats” (“You’ll Need to Know This if You’re in Vietnam” 33). The young men themselves are said to have, “the glazed, impaled, confused and resigned look of the raw citizen-soldier about to plunge into the fabled terrors of basic Army training” (“You’ll Need to Know This if You’re in Vietnam” 33). These young men, or boys, are thrown into basic training and even shown to us as “confused,” and about to enter into what they have only read and heard about in “fabled” tales. While the article does not mean to undercut the aptitude of these young men, the writer does suggest that their youth and situation as draftees in this unpopular war makes them all the more in need of support.

Both of these articles attempt to understand the condition of soldiers in training – how young men deal with being thrust into war. The portrayals are working to access the emotions of the readers, reminding civilians of the sacrifice of soldiers, instead of the reality of war. If

¹⁰ Full Citation: “Draft, The.” *Newsweek Magazine*. 11 Apr. 1966: 34.

Newsweek sought to explain what America was doing by going to war, the soldier would not need to be involved in that; war itself is often explained in political terms. However, because Newsweek sought to give a sympathetic look into one aspect of the war, the publication was able to speak of soldiers who are not yet immersed in the violence of war and therefore, still maintain a bit of youthful innocence. This youthfulness is emphasized by the writer's descriptions of trainees and trainers (recruits and drill sergeants). The trainees are "rookies," who "in Vietnam at night..." might "shine a flashlight," while the trainers are perhaps, "babying them" ("You'll Need to Know This if You're in Vietnam" 33). Here, the soldiers are not simply soldiers. They are boys – American boys.

These articles provide an understanding of how *Newsweek* deals with soldiers before they have fully become soldiers, but this is not the only way the magazine presents draftees. "Men at War," for example follows soldiers in the field who have experienced war completely. This article, which appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* on August 1, 1966, also acknowledges the soldier's youth, but is more focused on their moral character, and their sense of duty to American ideals.

"Men at War" follows a number of soldiers from different ranks for a few days of their deployment.¹¹ This gives a picture of how the men interact with each and how they think of themselves in the situation. Unlike the articles above, this story speaks of the war in more immediate terms – the obvious difference between training camp and combat soldiers. What is similar is the depiction of the soldiers individually as being dutiful, and not violent. The violence spoken of in the article occurs around them or to them: marines react "...as the enemy

¹¹ The cover story of *Newsweek*'s August 1, 1966 edition.

opens up [fire]” or being “too cautious, and that’s when Charlie gets them” (“Men at War” 32).¹² They are in danger, but not enacting danger.

Even in the naming of the enemy, these soldiers are lauded for their consideration of him. The name Charlie, which is often used by the soldiers, is described as an example of these men’s humanity:

...they don’t especially hate him [the enemy]. They have no profane or hate-laden epithets for him. He is simply Charlie, old Charlie (from the phonetic shorthand for Viet Cong, Victor Charlie), and he’s out there, somewhere in the jungle morass, as much an object of grudging respect for his damnable tenacity as he is an object of detached loathing for the calculated horrors he inflicts on his own people. (“Men at War” 28)

The soldiers “don’t especially hate” their enemy, or blame the enemy for anything in particular. While they have some respect for the Viet Cong because each side is doing a job and has a duty, they continue to see their role as superior. Yet, even if the respect these soldiers have for the VC, for Charlie is somewhat condescending, that they have this respect at all is part of what makes these soldiers so appealing to the reader; they have respect enough for themselves and their role to respect the opposite. It shows a depth and an emotional maturity now that these soldiers have left training and made it to Vietnam.

The article does not necessarily propose that readers ought to have this same respect for the VC, but rather shows its readers that the Americans fighting this war are moral, and understanding of their counterparts. This is furthered by the description Major Harry Phillips gives of the VC: “I look at these little guys, and I know they’ve probably got families worrying

¹² Charlie, Viet Cong and VC are all interchangeable terms for the enemy in Vietnam.

about them just like I have. We should have compassion for Charlie, not matter what he does. Charlie in some ways is as idealistic as we are” (“Men at War” 28). This exemplar soldier pities the Viet Cong; he does not hate them or delight in their deaths. He shows that he has the capacity to fulfill his duty without being fully immersed in the violence of war. The “compassion” that he feels for “Charlie” is another part of his emotional and moral maturity. This also brings the readership into the world of war, without violence, and instead with sympathy – for the soldier and the soldier’s enemy. Even the soldiers see the American efforts as “idealistic,” comparing it with the same for the VC, shows that these soldiers understand something deeper in war.

Along with the depth and maturity of the men who have reached the battlefields of war, they are also a group who is not decidedly violent; instead they are depicted as professionals even in this setting of war. As the reporter explains:

This is not a stridently hard-boiled army (though some individuals in it are); it is tough, it is trained to fight and it fights exceeding[ly] well – but it does its fighting with the quiet, laconic, can-do doggedness of professionals. No one is particularly “Gung-Ho” and none of Sergeant Eichelberger’s paratroopers would ever even think of yelling, “Geronimo.” (“Men at War” 28)

Basically, these men are in Vietnam are there to do a job, not to prove that they are heroes. There is not the idea that their efforts are achieving some idealized goal. Rather, they are fighting a war that they were trained to fight. They are good soldiers, because America is certain to train the soldiers well. The article gives a cold, simplistic understanding to the business of war. The soldiers are called “professionals,” not “warriors,” or even “soldiers.” They do not

need or want pity; instead they are disassociated from the war that they fight as professionals within these battles.

***Newsweek* in the Early 2000s: How *Newsweek* Portrayed the War on Terror**

While there was, at least in the beginning, somewhat less controversy surrounding the War on Terror – largely due to the facts that it responded to an attack on American soil and that there was no draft in place – there is a greater ease with which the war, the government and its actions are called into question. Because the War on Terror began as a conflict of retaliation, Americans were able to see their country’s violence as responsive, instead of preemptive. This is essential in understanding why support was more visible for both the war and the soldier. In the early 2000s, soldiers were spoken of more directly and more often in *Newsweek Magazine*. The war was a response to violence, and so soldiers are lauded for their role in that response as protective and just. In general though, soldiers are seen as examples of high sacrifice and bravery; it is much easier to find support for troops, than it is for wars. They can be discussed as separate entities, outside of the war. Note the following figure, which shows how Americans were expressing their newfound patriotism after September 11, 2001.

Since the war in Iraq began in 2003, have you, personally, done any of the following, or not?	Yes	No	No Opinion
	%	%	%
Prayed for those affected by the war	87	13	*
Displayed a yellow ribbon on your car or property to show support for the troops	51	49	--
Cried because of something related to the war	50	50	*
Sent letters, e-mails or care packages to any U.S. troops in Iraq	43	57	--
Voted for or against a political candidate mainly because of your views on the war	36	64	1
Attended a funeral or memorial service for Americans who died in Iraq	17	83	*
Publicly opposed the war by participating in a demonstration or writing to a public official	13	87	*
Publicly supported the war by participating in a demonstration or writing to a public official	11	89	*

* Less than 0.5%

Figure 2: Gallup Poll, War on Terror Troop Support ¹³

Many can look back on the aftermath of September 11th and remember moments of extreme patriotism. Even I remember feeling the need – from my own sense of national obligation and from peer pressure – to purchase some sort of “America” merchandise in the first weeks after 9/11.¹⁴ Notice that 51% of the respondents had put bumper stickers on their cars – 51% is significant. Kristin Hass notes, in her upcoming book on soldiering that “[t]he bumper stickers proclaiming, ‘Support our Troops’ are everywhere. Casual conversations and congressional

¹³ Full Citation: Carroll, Joseph. “Majority of Americans Say Iraq War Has Negatively Affected Country: Nearly 9 in 10 Americans have prayed for those affected by the war.” 17 Mar. 2006. Web Accessed Sept. 2009. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/21949/majority-americans-say-iraq-war-has-negatively-affected-country.aspx>

¹⁴ In my case, this merchandise was a t-shirt emblazoned with the flag and the phrase, “These Colors Don’t Run.” Identical t-shirts were worn for months around my school.

debates are structured by this support. It is ubiquitous, and it is potent” (Hass, 2009, 4). There is more than consensus about supporting the troops, feeling proud of the soldiers as individuals, there is a feeling of obligation. Many people were driving around with bumper stickers proclaiming their support, expressing this support to each other, and seeing it propagated very publically by others. In this same period, *Newsweek* published more stories about soldiers and, in turn the war itself. Together these factors suggest that this frequency is reflective of the more supportive public atmosphere seen at the beginning of the War on Terror. The editors have a financial interest in pleasing their readers, their customers. During the Vietnam War the general public (i.e. the civilian public) was not necessarily unsupportive of troops as we might understand that phrasing today, but rather understood that soldiers were what the people in the general public perceived as physical representations of the war. Though the Vietnam War is an exception to the normative relationship between the public and the soldiers, soldiers are generally supported individually regardless of the public’s perception of the given war. Often, soldiers are supported even as they enact wars without the same support.¹⁵ Today the soldier is not held accountable for the war they fight – the soldier is separated in political and public arenas. *Support the troops. Support our troops. Support your troops.* This is language Americans hear constantly. It is in the media, the politics and everyday conversations – and *that* is markedly different from the climate of the Vietnam War.

With so many people publically proclaiming their support and interest in the troops specifically, it is not surprising to find that *Newsweek Magazine* published more stories about the soldiers in the early 2000s than in the mid-sixties. Soldiers occupy a unique space in war, and in

¹⁵ This will be discussed further in the coming section, but can also be seen in Kristin Hass’ work on troop support and war in her upcoming book’s first chapter: [Sacrificing Soldiers: War Memorials on the National Mall.](#)

the conception of war, because they are the human figures within the actions of a nation.¹⁶ Thus, as *Newsweek* goes about explaining and dealing with the controversies of war, soldiers are a space for bringing human interest pieces into pieces about war. In this line of thinking, this framing, we will see *Newsweek* presented soldiers in Afghanistan and later Iraq who are at risk, dying, fighting for their comrades – framing their efforts as defensive and always justified. Readers are not told about killing, but winning. Even the successes in war are kept abstract when dealing with the soldiers who enact the war.

Early in the War on Terror, *Newsweek* published articles about the war itself and about soldiers who are in the heat of battle. Within the first two months after September 11th, *Newsweek* runs a cover story on Special Ops who are “hunting” Osama bin Laden (Thomas, 2001, 30). These are not the same conditions, or even the same soldiers as were seen in the sixties. Soldiers are openly discussed, America is openly taking violent action against terrorism, however abstract the term might be or have been. In the previous section of this chapter, I discussed a listing of many *Newsweek* cover stories on the Vietnam War to show the absence of soldiers from the press’ and the public’s take on war; below I will give a similar listing, but from a much shorter time period. In the post 9/11 world, *Newsweek* publishes war stories (with or without soldiers present) at a much greater volume and frequency than in the sixties.

Less than a month after 9/11, on November 5, 2001 *Newsweek* ran the cover story (of a special edition), “Protecting America: What Must Be Done.” This article formally names the efforts of the government as “War on Terror;” this naming refers to efforts within the states to keep all kinds of possible threats from reaching fruition, as well as possible efforts overseas

¹⁶ This idea is even more complicated in that there are individuals working for the nation (the presidents) by deciding what these other people (soldiers) will do.

(Begley 28). Within the article are various charts measuring the risks of various threats – everything from mail room anthrax to stadium bombings – these threats are given ratings on categories of: “Vulnerability... Potential Loss... [and] Priority” (Begley 28-40). As a nation still feeling itself under attack, this article focuses on what might happen here and spends very little time on what America and its soldiers might do in response overseas.

The following week, *Newsweek's* cover is emblazoned with, “Generation 9-11: Terror, War and Recession Hit Home on Campus.”¹⁷ The article takes a sampling of University of Michigan students and attempts to understand what has changed because of September 11th – curriculum, careers and classes apparently (Kantrowitz 48-50). The article speaks of war as an opportunity for this generation of young to claim some “seriousness and guidance,” instead of simply caring about pop culture (Kantrowitz 53). This brings the civilian into the war by giving agency to the act of support. Those who are American can participate through their support of the war. In this way, the coming war is only looked at as a positive possibility. Only two weeks later, *Newsweek* runs another cover story about the war and Osama Bin Laden: “The Hunt for Bin Laden.” This article, which will be discussed at length in the next section of this chapter, features soldiers directly in action, as they actively hunt and kill Al Qaeda. They are shown in helicopters, with weapons and with intent to kill.¹⁸ *Newsweek's* next edition, from December 3, 2001, features a cover story of President and Mrs. Bush speaking about a variety of issues, including the war, but only in abstract terms. The next three issues of *Newsweek Magazine*

¹⁷ On the cover: three University of Michigan students, Paxton Williams, Brenda Fathy Abdelall and Ben Perry.

¹⁸ Article by Evan Thomas from *Newsweek* on November 26, 2001.

feature cover stories on terrorism and/or discussions of policies surrounding terrorists, but none discuss the war or the soldier in specifics.¹⁹

Though the coming weeks feature more variety in the topics of cover stories, it is clear from the features of late 2001 that *Newsweek* was publishing material on the War on Terror with greater frequency than was ever seen for Vietnam. There seems to be a greater ease with which the war can be discussed in this era – coming from a nation responding to tragedy. As the time passes, and the War on Terror becomes a more standard, full-scale war, doubts about the war itself and role of America in the Middle East grow. These doubts will lead to a new understanding of the soldier – framing them as patriots who sacrifice rather than patriots who hunt and kill the enemy.

On November 26, 2001, *Newsweek Magazine* runs its first cover story specifically dealing with soldiers in action; the article is called: “The Hunt for Bin Laden.” This story spends time with actual soldiers in Afghanistan who are actively “hunting” for Osama bin Laden from helicopters, tanks and battalions (Thomas, 2001, 32). At the beginning of the war, before it could be fully considered a “war,” Americans were supportive of the efforts at extremely high rates – 85% according to *Newsweek* in November 2001 (Begley 31).²⁰ The rhetoric used to describe the actions of the soldiers is not apologetic or passive in any way. Thomas writes, “The American commandos ‘are killing Taliban who won’t surrender and Al Qaeda [who] are trying to move from one place to another,’ said Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld” (Thomas, 2001, 33). These soldiers are fiercely portrayed as “killing,” not defending. This is not to say that they

¹⁹ Dates and titles of the cover stories: from December 10, 2001 – “Secret Trails – Justice vs. Terror: How Far Should We Go?,” from December 17, 2001 – “American Taliban: The Saga of John Walker,” and from December 24, 2001 – “After the Evil: What Can Be Done to Reform the Arab World.”

²⁰ “War” in this case meaning that Americans soldiers in Afghanistan were said to be looking, hunting bin Laden and were not engaged in full-scale combat. The specialization of their actions was still small enough at the time to be separated from our understanding of standard/historical wars.

are framed as unjust in these actions – these efforts are in direct response to 9/11, and not preemptive at all.

The article draws a parallel between the Vietnam War and the current efforts of American troops, reflecting a national conversation that had “...pundits predicting quagmire and talk show experts comparing the Taliban to the Viet Cong” (Thomas, 2001, 32). Though these similarities are squashed by Rumsfeld, there is still a sense of worry surrounding what may come from fighting the Taliban. Still, the soldiers are seen publically as effective – the article shows that “69% [of *Newsweek* respondents] think it’s now very or somewhat likely that bin Laden will be captured or killed” (Thomas, 2001, 34). These soldiers are sites of violence against violence and their efforts are seen as leading to a definitive end – the death or capture of Osama bin Laden.

As American efforts to find bin Laden and defeat Al Qaeda expanded – both temporally and spatially – the assuredness seen in November began to fade (69% were confident of bin Laden’s capture or death). As America went to war in Afghanistan, *Newsweek* began publishing articles that were increasingly critical of the Bush Administration’s policies and the possible gains of the war at all. This change in public opinion, or at least understanding, is reflected in *Newsweek*’s publishing habits as well; in the first months of 2002, soldiers are presented more similarly to their portrayal during the Vietnam War – more as suffering patriots who sacrifice than as patriots who kill.

This portrayal of the soldiers as more passive, more pitiable, is seen clearly in the March 18, 2002 edition of *Newsweek Magazine*, which features a cover story entitled, “They Were Soldiers.”²¹ The article details the death (again, the death, not the active duty) of eight

²¹ The full title of the article appears on the cover as: “THEY WERE SOLDIERS [*sic*]: The fighting was thick. They were cold, dizzy from the altitude, under fire from Al Qaeda in the frigid, thin air. Eight Americans gave their

American soldiers who died in battle while fighting Al Qaeda. These soldiers are victims of war. Their sacrifice, especially because their deaths saved others, is the ultimate act of soldiering. As one private recounts of his fellow soldier in the article: “He died fighting so his comrades would live” (Thomas, 2002, 24). To the soldiers, these deaths are not looked upon as having national implications, or as being responsible for the furthering of the objectives of the war; instead, these deaths are individual moments of sacrifice. These men died for their friends first, and then, maybe, for their country. The comrades of the fallen describe these men as heroes, not patriots, first. Their sacrifices are looked at as following a code of bravery, the ethics of dying in war: “American soldiers do not abandon their dead and wounded on the battlefield. For Special Operators, the elite soldiers chosen to play the riskiest roles in combat, the warrior’s code is a question of honor” (Thomas, 2002, 24). These soldiers see their duty as to each other, not to the task of war itself. In seeing themselves this way, and also by the magazine’s understanding of them in this way, their role is humanized, depoliticized and made as a stationary issue of honor. Dying is the action of war for the soldiers here, not killing.

This article depicts soldiers in a similar way as the “Men at War” article described above, which is from 1966. These similarities suggest that the national climate on war was similar in these periods; both wars were becoming more controversial as the military presence abroad grew. “They Were Soldiers” and “Men at War” both aim to give representations of men dealing with war, less than they aim to represent the actual fighting of war. Soldiers are shown as being brave and dutiful even in the face of tragedy; these are not men who sought out war, but rather who have come to accept their roles as American soldiers. Dying is honorable, but killing is reactionary and only happens when necessary.

lives. THIS IS THEIR STORY.” On the contents page, the title is given more simply as: “Operation Anaconda’s Code of Honor.”

While dying seems to operate as an issue of honor for the soldiers in this article, the initial step of going to war is also framed as an issue of patriotism. For example, among the eight soldiers killed, one is a father, with young children who described his decision to join to his family in complicated terms: “‘He said that as a father, he wanted to stay home,’ explained his sister Lori. ‘But as an American, as a Special Ops guy, he wanted to go. He knew it was something he had to do’” (Thomas, 2002, 25). Even from this man’s family’s point of view, he was doing something that he had no choice in. Though he was a volunteer, he also felt that being a soldier was his only morally responsible option as an American patriot. That is not to assume, of course, that he felt trapped or that this was out of desperation. Instead, this “Special Ops guy” seems to have felt it was his duty; it was so right to be a soldier, he could do nothing else.

The piece goes on to quote an Afghan soldier, and it acknowledges the death of Afghan soldiers in this specific battle, but Thomas never comments on these men as brave or honorable; only the Americans involved are portrayed as heroes. He uses interviews from other Afghan soldiers simply for background, logistical information – “We ran up the hill...” and “too many shots to count...” (Thomas, 2002, 25). Though the article features these soldiers as having knowledge of the battle and an understanding of what is happening in the war, they are also met with some skepticism of their views and abilities. This is reflected by the reporter’s “verifying” of facts with Americans (Thomas, 2002, 25). There is no attempt to make the Afghan soldiers, though fighting side by side with Americans, seem brave or righteous. They are not praised for their sacrifice, but just vessels through which we can learn about the topography, the factual happenings of the battles.

Conclusion

These readings of *Newsweek Magazine* from the mid-1960s and the early 2000s, are suggestive of the way the public encountered the image of the soldier and the war in these eras. Both the Vietnam War and the War on Terror remain controversial wars in public opinion and memory. *Newsweek* reflects the public's questioning of the politics of war, while further complicating this with presentations of soldiers in unsupported wars. Generally, these soldiers are presented as being moral, patriotic and deserving of support regardless of the standing of the war itself. This is achieved by framing the soldiers as dutiful rather than vengeful, as quietly patriotic, not violent; *Newsweek* depicts soldiers as being present in war, not actively causing it. However, the few months that immediately followed 9/11 reflect a change in the normative framing because the military action was publically heavily supported in this short period. Thus, the rhetoric shows soldiers and the war in a new way. Here, the soldiers are violently fighting, instead of being fought. The war is justified, instead of questioned.

In this instance, this rhetoric shapes the overall American perspective on the perceived enemy and the support the nation requires: "The [rhetorical language] worked to describe enemy activity as mental illness: insanity, religious fanaticism, or irrational resentment ('They hate us for our freedom'), demoting unauthorized violence from a political condition to a disease epidemic that must be 'eradicated.' A similar rhetoric applied to dissent on the home front" (Stahl 546).²² Although Stahl focuses on the enemy, his last sentence, which points to the perception of war on the home-front, shows that this framing works to prevent and discourage

²² Stahl uses the phrase "They hate us for our freedom," as a sudo-quote from American politicians, and President Bush in the wake of September 11th based on their framing of the enemy and its hatred for Americans.

dissent against the war as a whole. In the same way that enemy is framed as crazy and extreme, those who disagree with the war are framed in the same light; those who dissent are portrayed in this language as unreasonable. At the base of many arguments for war, any war at all, is the belief that the enemy is without redemptive, or even human, qualities and must be stopped regardless of the cost. If the enemy is defined this way, the war's purpose is more easily defined and the role of the soldier becomes responsive and more concretely active. As can be seen in *Newsweek*, this kind of understanding of the war allows the soldier to be violent with reason and this is the only time soldiers are seen as actively performing the violent parts of war. Language not only changes the definition of war, but also the possible definitions of the soldier. It becomes dichotomous, yet homogenous. The soldier is tragic and heroic, yet uncomplicated.

The shift in rhetoric seen in early 2002 shows that as public opinion began to split, losing the unity seen immediately after the attacks, the soldier's portrayal also changed. As the War on Terror became a source of greater controversy, *Newsweek's* coverage of the soldier changes from a view of soldiers in battle, to a portrayal of soldiers dealing with the aftermath and promise of battle. The soldiers here, and in Vietnam, are shown as performing their duty without zest, without lust for the fighting and, instead, as men (there are few featured women) who are good and present in the face of war.²³

Newsweek Magazine writes about soldiers who will interest their readers without offending them; instead, these articles speak of war through soldiers so that it is relatable, vulnerable and less abstract. The soldiers become a way of reporting on the war without

²³ In the articles from *Newsweek Magazine* that are featured in this thesis, there are no women soldiers present – through interviews, figures or in background information. The draft did not apply to any women for the Vietnam War, of course, so their absence is understandable. In the War on Terror though, there are female soldiers fighting, but they are often not featured in the *Newsweek* articles – none of the cover stories that I read discussed female soldiers at all.

editorializing about the causes or justness of it. After all, these soldiers make few claims about the righteousness or immorality of the wars in which they fight. The reporters who write about these men in and out of battle also leave the politics behind, choosing to focus on the common tropes that define the public's thinking of soldiers. The soldier's very presence garners sympathy from the American public and can serve as common ground on which the war can be discussed without controversy. *Newsweek Magazine* shows soldiers as being patriotic, brave and endangered when the war is in question – they are divided so that the soldier can remain blameless, caught in circumstance. The readers and writers are all imagining the soldier as existing outside of the war. Remember, "...they don't especially hate him [the enemy]. They have no profane or hate-laden epithets for him..." ("Men at War" 28). The men themselves are always seen as moral. *Newsweek's* articles frame soldiers as safely as the presidents in their State of the Union messages; the soldier is a proud member of society, regardless of the war he fights.

Conclusion

Chapter One examines how the State of the Union functions as an opportunity for the president to frame the country's current events and future goals; meaning that the president has an annual forum which can be used to shape how the public perceives various state affairs. In times of war, this address has even greater importance because it is one of the president's most widely recognized moments of national discourse. For all of the presidents discussed in this chapter, the State of the Union features much talk of war, yet few direct acknowledgments of the soldiers who fight abroad. The presidents use the image of the soldier to inspire public sympathy and garner support for a part of the war without actually demanding support for it directly. If the citizen must support the soldier, then the citizen must fund the soldier and if the soldier is funded, then war is funded as well. When the war is spoken of abstractly as being "America's" or "the government's" war, the agents of war are lost in the figurative constructions of this ideological battle; the soldier's role is no longer relevant to a discussion of a war of ideas. The soldier is taken out of the discussion of war so that it can be thought of in terms of its end goals and not the immediate costs, the human costs paid by the soldiers.

Chapter Two studies the cover stories of *Newsweek Magazine* as the Vietnam War and War on Terror were beginning and becoming more controversial in their respective time periods. From start to finish the Vietnam War was confusing to many members of the American public; the purpose, costs and tactics were unclear and constantly questioned in many facets of society. This controversy may suggest that the media covering the war would attempt to remain as neutral as possible so as not to alienate readers. *Newsweek* presents soldiers as participants of

duty; they are not agents of war, but the humans who fight it. Soldiers are depicted without political agency, and can therefore be less emblematic of the controversy of the war itself. The stories are of young men, boys really, who are just entering basic training and facing their fears. Later, when *Newsweek* does discuss the conditions of men who are deployed, the soldiers are still performing a job, and not excitedly seeking the enemy. We see much of the same framing in the War on Terror with soldiers being portrayed as equally brave and as powerless subjects of battle. The exception occurs only when the U.S. first begins its manhunt for Al Qaeda's top members; this particular effort was specialized and responsive, which significantly decreased public confusion as was seen in Vietnam. However, as the war grew into our current conception of the War on Terror, the public became less and less understanding of America's involvement in the Middle East. As this shift in public opinion takes place, we also see *Newsweek* printing stories that feature soldiers in ways similar to the Vietnam War era. Soldiers are again made out as professionals, performing their duties without zealotry. This shows that *Newsweek*, first does not wish to go outside of public opinion, and also that even in times of great dissent against wars, the soldier can be a non-controversial way of speaking about the war as long as the soldier is shown as equally powerless in the war as the public imagines itself.

I must note that because the *Newsweek* issues from this period rarely appear in databases (which almost always have issues from 1975 on), even my best efforts to gain access to every interesting issue were not completely fruitful. Through tireless archive searches and many bidding wars on ebay.com, I was able to secure most necessary articles for this thesis. The gaps in the archives give reason to further explore the implications of public discourse in the period. Within the many pages of the many editions of this magazine, there are vast collections of untouched data and writing, waiting for a critical eye. A further study of these texts would

enrich our understanding of how the soldier has been imagined historically and how these images have affected our imagination today. The same, of course, applies to the many speeches other than the State of the Union, which are often given by the president. Devoting the time to analyze these many formations and depictions of the soldiers and the wars would bring us a fuller, richer understanding of the soldier.

As a whole, this thesis aims to suggest that the image of the soldier is exploited, and manipulated by public officials and mainstream publications as they present it to the public. Soldiers occupy a unique space in the imagination of war because they are the people, the individuals who enact wars that are often only thought of as ideas and only spoken of as abstractions. Like President Kennedy and President Johnson, President Bush struggled to make a case for a war in a nation that cooled its support for the battle and not the troops. As Klein says, “But you can’t argue a people into war, especially one that seems so indistinct and perplexing,” (Klein 36) but he must try. Civilians show their patriotism in bumper stickers, votes and tears, soldiers show theirs in battle – or so we say. We are constantly reshaping and reassessing the memories we have whether they are personal, political or national. It changes and we must watch for that, study that and question it. We construct the patriotic symbols that we have as a nation; there must be responsibility in finding out how and why as well.

The War on Terror, catalyzed by 9/11, and the Vietnam War occupy incredibly different moments in history, but that does not invalidate what is so interesting in their relationship. Vietnam was a bad war; one Americans do not like to remember. The War on Terror could very well result in a similar memory; this reality is largely why there is such an effort to frame the war as justified and the troops as heroic. This rhetoric is complicated and problematic, which is precisely why it must be studied and discussed.

Understanding how the public sees and is told to see the soldier eventually leads us to wonder what the soldiers are thinking of themselves and the constructions of their own image. While this project does not have the breadth to cover such a complex topic, I would like to offer a brief reading of a small sample of texts written by soldiers about soldiers. Though I am not fully able to examine these texts and their counterparts, acknowledging their presence and wide-ranging feelings regarding the role of the soldier is essential for our understanding of the significance of the public's imagination of the same.

The most complex imaginings of what soldiers are and are not (and importantly what they can and cannot be) come from personal narratives of soldiers themselves. From fiction to poetry to blog entries, soldiers have attempted, in both Vietnam and the War on Terror, to understand their roles as soldiers. Matthew Currier Burden, a former Major in the United States Army, has compiled a collection of writings and his own analysis in *The Blog of War: Frontline Dispatches from Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan* which aims to illuminate the lives of soldiers, their families and the politicians who construct (or at least attempt to do so) their very identities as soldiers.

On killing his first man, one soldier writes: "You had no other choice. (Except not to fight. If you even thought that for a second, put your Birkenstocks and socks back on, stuff your granola up your ass, and get out, hippie.)" (Burden 146). This soldier resents the men and women who refuse to fight, or at least those who would tell him not to do so. He uses extremes to counter who he is; by making the non-soldier lazy, foolish and/or unpatriotic, he creates an ethos for himself which is all the more heroic, all the more patriotic. He also speaks in a way that insists on the absence of choice. It is call of duty, a job, a responsibility. He is not a blood-hungry animal, just a patriot. He goes on:

You see, the army is my job. It's my 9-5 (or, rather, my 0400-2359). If you ask me who I am, I'll tell you about my family, my beliefs, and somewhere in there I may mention that I am in the Army. Way back when I was a youngster, my mom wondered aloud to Dad if I would do well in the Army (this was after I graduated from Basic Training). She was worried because I was still the same goofy kid at home. Dad told her, "Yeah, he'll be fine. What you don't see is that when he goes around the corner, he's not your little boy anymore. He's now a Soldier, and a damn good one." (Thanks, Dad). (Burden 147)

This shows that he has constructed two identities, and that construction is shared by his father, and most of the nation. This separation is comforting. It allows us to believe that: "It wasn't personal, just business... Killing is my business... And business is good" (Burden 147). This man, who even I refer to as a soldier, is clear that being a soldier is a job, and not an identity that he ascribes to himself. He re-emphasizes this separation by including the story of his mother and father's discussion. His father explains that the son is no longer the same person when he is performing his duties as a soldier. The word "soldier" is even made to be "Soldier," now a proper noun and indicative of a role taken on, a new identity for the battlefield. Being a soldier is now becoming a "Soldier," which has the full script of the American imagination – all the history of patriotism and bravery ascribed to the role of American "Soldiers." As he says, the business he is in, his career is "killing," and so to imagine him as a son would be problematic for his parents – thus, his mother calling him a "kid." His parents deconstruct the connection, imagining that "when he goes around the corner, he's not your little boy anymore." This allows them to see a transformation so that he, the son, is not a killer – here, he, the son, is transformed once in uniform and freed from the possible consequences of his "business," which by the way "is good."

Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is a fictional piece based on his experiences during and in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. As a writer, O'Brien's many works are almost entirely based on his experiences in there. O'Brien's reflections on war and writing, in general, deal with the emotional and psychological after-effects of war. The stories follow many different soldiers, all of whom are connected to a fictionalized version of O'Brien himself who knew them or served with them in Vietnam. He is not only telling the stories he saw, but those he imagined and hoped for. He follows men on the battlefield, losing friends and denying realities. It is a narrative that is his and theirs; above all, it is personal.

The Things They Carried postulates that stories of war need to be emotionally, not just factually accurate to be true, the work also avers that "stories can save us" (O'Brien 255). The final chapter, "The Lives of the Dead" follows a less fictional O'Brien and traces his feelings about writing the narrative about his real and semi-fake friends. He is dealing with death and the guilt of causing death: "I keep dreaming [them] alive... They're all dead. But in a story, which is a kind of dreaming, the dead sometimes smile and sit up and return to the world" (O'Brien 255). Now instead of being primarily concerned with the reality of some distinctive, untouchable truth, O'Brien finds he is hoping that these stories, truths in themselves, work to recreate life and bring back moments of innocence, also untouched. Instead of suffering through guilt and the harsh realities of people in life, these stories allow men to be remembered as heroes, like Curt Lemon: "real soldier's soldiers" (O'Brien 76).

As O'Brien says of stories: "The picture gets jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it *seemed*" (O'Brien 78). O'Brien is defending his own fiction. As a soldier, he feels worried about telling

his reader these ‘true’ war stories and how much they will believe him. O’Brien tells his reader that they are allowed to believe fiction, “In many cases a true war story cannot be believed. If you believe it, be skeptical. It’s a question of credibility. Often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn’t, because the normal stuff is necessary to make you believe the truly incredible craziness” (O’Brien 79). O’Brien creates fiction that is taking history and reforming it so that the emotions are the main event, the detail of utmost importance is always the emotional impact.

From just these brief readings of soldiers’ texts, it is clear that the public imagination of soldiers affects them and further complicates how they imagine themselves and their roles in the business of war. The soldier is an important site of American patriotism; we look to them as emblematic of Americanism. It should matter to us how the soldier and the soldier’s image are used and manipulated when speaking of war.

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